



Testimony in Support of H.B. 06692 – An Act Authorizing Certain Arts, Culture and Tourism Grants

Michelle McCabe, Executive Director
Connecticut Main Street Center

Joint Committee on Commerce
February 23, 2023

Dear Senator Hartley, Representative Meskers, Senator Martin, Representative Harrison and the distinguished members of the Commerce Committee:

I write on behalf of the Connecticut Main Street Center, Inc. (CMSC) in support of H.B. 06692 as it will provide the much-needed funding to strengthen this important sector and, by extension, support thriving main streets and downtowns across the state.

As the state's leading downtown resource for nearly twenty-five years, Connecticut Main Street serves as the state coordinating program of national Main Street America. We assist main streets and downtowns execute a proven four-point approach for revitalization and sustained vitality across rural, suburban and urban municipalities. Without question, a robust arts, culture and tourism ecosystem contributes broadly to the health of Connecticut and specifically to that of our downtowns. Our main street experience entices residents and tourists alike to live, work and play in Connecticut; our quality of life and unique communities are assets to bring in and retain our workforce, recruit new companies and grow existing ones, and encourage visitors to contribute to our economy. We know that the arts are a critical component to a great main street.

Our main streets and downtowns are grappling with two conflicting new realities. On the one hand, a wide diversity of people from young workers to empty nesters want to live in walkable communities. On the other, traditional workplaces and shopping habits shifted dramatically with the pandemic. All types of businesses, including our arts and cultural organizations, are now trying to adjust to these changes in consumer behavior.

Many of our arts and culture organizations are situated on a main street or in a downtown and serve as anchor institutions for the community. Theatre performances, public art projects, outdoor concert series, historical walking tours, and many other assets and activities bring life and economic activity to main street. The arts and culture sector gave us outdoor activities when we needed them most. They build community on the main streets that are everyone's neighborhood, create jobs, increase foot traffic for restaurants and retail, and help us to reimagine the new downtown environment as workplace and shopping habits change. Tourism shares Connecticut's main street experience to the broader world, bringing attention to small communities and large.



With increased and predictable funding to the Arts, Culture and Tourism sector, we will see more inventive collaborations across the state, changes which cannot reasonably be funded through ticket prices alone. Increased funding allows for equitable access to the arts, not just for audiences but for playwrights, artists, musicians, dance troupes, and new filmmakers because organizations have the freedom to engage and cultivate new talent. Reliable funding allows for the sector's freedom to invest in innovative partnership and cross-marketing with main street and downtown organizations, municipal governments, and small businesses, and would support increased marketing of our main streets to tourists. As a convener of stakeholders, CMSC looks forward to an opportunity to facilitate these new partnerships, bringing national best practices to our municipalities, and seeing the benefits of collaboration being felt across all of Connecticut's Main Streets and downtowns.

Thank you for your consideration of this measure. Please contact me at (203) 767-8045 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle McCabe", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Michelle Lapine McCabe
Executive Director